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Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Promotion and protection of the rights of the child

Follow-up to the United Nations special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to the request of the General Assembly in its resolutions 58/157 and 58/282, that the Secretary-General prepare an updated report on progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the final document of the twenty-seventh special session of the Assembly, entitled "A world fit for children", with a view to identifying problems and constraints and making recommendations on actions needed to achieve further progress, submit the report to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and continue to provide regular progress reports to the Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is the second update of progress made in the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children, which was held from 8 to 10 May 2002. The first progress report (A/58/333) was submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-eight session.

2. At the historic special session, delegations from 190 countries adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). It committed Governments to a time-bound set of goals for children and young people, with a particular focus on: (a) promoting healthy lives; (b) providing quality education; (c) protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and (d) combating HIV/AIDS.

3. Delegates also committed their Governments to a framework for moving forward, which included:

(a) Developing or strengthening of action plans for children, including specific goals and targets, by the end of 2003, with wide involvement of civil society, including NGOs and children;

(b) Strengthening national planning, coordination, implementation and resource allocation for children and integrating the international goals of "A world fit for children" into national policies and plans;

(c) Establishing or strengthening national bodies for the promotion and protection of children's rights;

(d) Regular monitoring of the situation of children at the national level and periodic reviews of progress towards the fulfilment of the global agenda.

4. As noted in the first progress report, the four major goal areas of "A world fit for children" strongly reinforce the United Nations Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, seven of which directly address and affect the rights of children. It was clearly recognized that the building of a world fit for children would be a major step in fulfilling the commitments made at the Millennium Summit. The present report also anticipates many of the issues, which will form part of the major review of progress on the Millennium Declaration to be presented in 2005.

5. The commitments of the special session on children are being implemented in the context of the coordinated follow-up to other major international conferences and summits as the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, which were both held in 2002. The goals set out in "A world fit for children" are also firmly grounded in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S-26/2, annex), adopted at the twenty-sixth special session of the Assembly, on HIV/AIDS.

6. The agenda of "A world fit for children" is closely linked with international efforts to ensure truly sustained development and to mobilize additional resources, owing to the very high potential of effective investments in the health, education and protection of children to contribute to broad-based poverty reduction and socio-economic progress.

II. Progress in the follow-up to the special session on children

A. Global trends in the follow-up process

7. In 2003, it was clear that, while many countries had taken concrete actions to translate the commitments made at the 2002 special session into national actions plans for children or to integrate them into existing plans and policies, the overall rate of progress had been uneven (see A/58/333). A year later, the global picture is significantly more encouraging.

8. Information received by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as of May 2004 indicates that 25 countries have now completed national plans of action for children since the special session and an additional 55 national plans for children are under formulation. A further 32 countries foresee the development of such plans. Some 14 countries had already developed national plans for children around the beginning of the decade and several of these are under revision.

9. As envisaged by the Assembly during its special session, many countries have chosen to incorporate the goals and commitments of "A world fit for children" into other national policy and planning instruments, such as poverty reduction strategies, national development plans and sector plans, including sector-wide approaches. Some 105 countries have used one or more of those instruments for their follow-up activities. Of these, some 53 countries are using poverty reduction strategies as a primary method for pursuing their national goals for children; 15 countries are using their national development plans; 4 are using national policy papers; and 33 are mainly using sectoral or multi-sectoral plans. In about 40 of the cases, a national plan for children is also being used to promote follow-up actions. An additional four countries, which have not developed a national plan, have nevertheless made increased budgetary allocations for priority areas for children.

10. Altogether, at least 170 countries have either taken or foresee taking some form of action to put the goals of the special session on children into operation.[1] Priority issues for children are thus being increasingly reflected throughout mainstream national planning processes. Many countries have also launched more specific initiatives in the priority areas of the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action, or are reviewing relevant national legislation in order to achieve greater consistency with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

11. Many Governments used a broad consultative process for developing plans of action for children and other responses. In most cases, input was obtained from a range of government ministries, NGOs, United Nations agencies, parliamentary representatives and local government authorities. Children who participated in the special session as official delegates were often involved. The consultations are likely to have fostered a wider ownership of follow-up actions, both within the public sector and in society at large. This in turn should increase the durability of efforts to implement the commitments of the special session.

12. In some cases, however, the follow-up process was slowed by external factors. Political instability has diverted attention in some cases, while armed conflict and other crises have also been a significant constraining factor. Nonetheless, some Governments faced with these problems have recognized the potential of the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action and the Millennium Development Goals to

provide a unifying agenda and a way of addressing public expectations as part of a process of social recovery.

B. Progress and trends among regions

13. Regions have pursued the follow-up to the special session on children at different speeds and have shown different preferences with regard to the best way to proceed. Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic States have seen outstanding progress in the initial planning phase. Almost all countries in the regions have completed their plans or are well advanced in doing so. Most of them have opted to develop national plans specifically for children.

14. Both the Latin America and the Caribbean and the Asia regions have made widespread efforts since the special session. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there has been a major focus on developing new national plans for children or revising existing ones. Countries in South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific have used a wider range of instruments, including national development plans, poverty reduction strategies and sectoral plans.

15. Of the 35 industrialized countries at the special session, some 20 have developed or are preparing national plans of action for children; 2 had developed national policy papers at the beginning of the decade; while 5 are following up through sectoral plans. The response among these countries has been significantly more dynamic than was the case following the 1990 World Summit for Children. Many have undertaken consultations and media initiatives with the general public, often with the support of civil society organizations and in collaboration with the national committees for UNICEF. Some industrialized countries are also seeking to reflect the commitments of the special session on children in their official development assistance.

16. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost two thirds of the countries have opted to integrate the goals of the special session into their poverty reduction strategies. In addition, some 18 countries have developed or intend to develop a national plan of action or policy paper on children. A number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are complementing their poverty reduction plans with specific policies on such issues as orphan care and protection, prevention of child trafficking and the reform of juvenile justice.

17. Progress to date has been most limited in the Middle East and North Africa. However, a number of countries in those regions foresee the development of a national plan of action for children and significant events have taken place at the regional level.

C. The role of regional mechanisms

18. Countries in every region have used intergovernmental mechanisms to follow up on the special session.

19. The second Intergovernmental Conference on Children in Europe and Central Asia was held in Sarajevo in May 2004 as a follow-up to the first Conference, which was held in Berlin in 2001 in preparation for the special session. It focused on

establishing a monitoring framework for "A world fit for children" and mobilizing political support. It also explored such key issues as the movement of children across borders, exclusion from education violence against children and strategies for making cities child friendly.

20. In the meeting of its inter-ministerial committee held in Mauritius in April 2003, the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union accorded high priority to young people and children. An advocacy and policy publication, *The Young Face of NEPAD*, was published jointly by the African Union, the secretariat of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Economic Commission for Africa and UNICEF. The African Union and UNICEF are also collaborating to establish a database on child-related indicators for Africa and a first monitoring report on the state of Africa's children has been prepared. The heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States have initiated a participatory peer review mechanism to monitor progress towards the goals related to children.

21. The 2003 Ibero-American Summit was preceded by a ministerial meeting on children and adolescents, which placed particular emphasis on indigenous children as well as the investments required to fulfil the goals of the Ibero-American plan of action and mechanisms for assessing progress in the implementation of national plans of action for children. The 2004 Ibero-American Summit will focus on the protection of children from violence. The Caribbean subregion has developed a framework that identifies early childhood development, quality basic education, child protection issues and HIV/AIDS as the main areas for action.

22. Following the sixth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Children, which was held in May 2003, a further regional consultation will be held in Cambodia in early 2005. Progress on the goals for children will be monitored closely for discussion at that meeting. The consultation will also build on the participation of developed countries from the region in the 2003 meeting by including them in the monitoring reports. In support of this regional monitoring process, UNICEF produced an atlas on children of East Asia and the Pacific, which was built around the goals of "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Declaration.

23. The League of Arab States initiated a special session of the Technical Consultative Committee on Childhood, which was held in Bahrain and was followed by the third Arab High-level Conference on the Rights of the Child, held in Tunis in January 2004. The outcome of this process was a regional plan of action to achieve the international goals for early childhood, quality education, child protection and adolescent participation. A recommendation to appoint a regional commissioner for children was also agreed upon. Some of the Governments in the region have launched a systematic follow-up process, updating their analysis of the situation of children and convening national meetings with civil society and young people to discuss plans of action.

24. Networks of parliamentarians, religious leaders, child rights groups, NGOs, women's organizations, professional associations and other agencies are following up on specific aspects of the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action in their respective regions, helping to keep the goals high on the political agenda as well as contributing to their implementation. For example, members of the Central and Eastern European Regional Network for Children, currently including more than

1,600 organizations, have worked with Governments to incorporate the special session goals into their national plans as well as to implement and monitor them. The Network has adopted the theme "Leave no child out" as the focus for its region-wide public awareness campaign for 2003-2004. The Latin American and Caribbean child rights caucus is similarly promoting follow-up to the national plans for children and has supported the creation of a network of children and young people to promote participation.

D. Strengths and weaknesses in the follow-up process

25. **Incorporation of goals for children**. The majority of national plans of action for children, national development plans and policy papers address all four priority areas of "A world fit for children" and include goals in each area. In most cases, those goals are directly measurable, with the exception of challenging areas in child protection, learning achievement and education quality. The poverty reduction strategies consistently address basic education and health as key investments for reducing poverty and also include provisions for clean water and improved sanitation. In countries with a high level of HIV prevalence, programmes are included to combat AIDS and in some cases to protect and improve food and nutrition security and provide for the care of orphans and other children affected by the epidemic. Poverty reduction strategies are thus providing a framework for significant national efforts to meet many of the goals of "A world fit for children". However, few of the poverty reduction strategies give significant focus to child protection issues and many place only limited emphasis on early childhood development.

26. **Participation of civil society in the follow-up process**. All of the planning processes have involved considerable consultation with a variety of constituencies. Poverty reduction strategies and national development plans have often involved trade unions, parliamentarians and the private sector in their formulation, whereas the national plans of action have more often involved children and young people themselves, through task forces, polls or children's parliaments. Efforts will need to be made to maintain that strong level of participation in the subsequent implementation and monitoring phases.

27. **Setting of goals for children beyond the national level**. Many of the national plans foresee the development of child-related goals at provincial, district and in some cases municipal levels. In a few countries, that process has been completed. There is growing recognition that the development of subnational plans relating to children can greatly enhance the impact of a national plan, by making it possible to identify the challenges and opportunities inherent to each local situation while fostering local ownership

28. **Efforts to reach the most disadvantaged groups**. The majority of the plans and policies include strategies that focus specifically on the most disadvantaged groups. The national plans of action for children tend to address the needs of disadvantaged children more explicitly than in other planning instruments. In most cases, the production of data to support programmes specifically oriented to disadvantaged families and children remains a challenge.

29. **Synergy between the goals of the Millennium Declaration and of the special session on children**. The strong focus of the goals of the Millennium

Declaration on the lives of children has created a positive synergy with the goals of "A world fit for children". Many national plans refer to both. The fact that the Millennium Development Goals benefit from widespread support from agencies whose mandate is not specifically for children, means that issues relating to children are now high on the international agenda. This creates a very positive environment for the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action. The special session goals provide greater specificity and also include the important area of child protection, which is not directly addressed by the Millennium Development Goals.

30. **Budget allocations to meet the goals**. Of the four categories of national policies and plans examined in the present report, only the poverty reduction strategies and national development plans have systematically included projected budgets and programme expenditures. Few of the national plans of action for children have well-developed budget information.

31. **Linkages with the Convention on the Rights of the Child**. The majority of the national plans of action for children make reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child or to the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the respective country reports. Other human rights instruments, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on minimum age (No. 138) and on the worst forms of child labour (No. 182) and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are also increasingly recognized as part of the framework for national plans of action. Almost all the national plans of action on children prepared since the special session foresee the need to review national legislation in relation to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A number also recognize the importance of child participation and outline strategies to increase the attention given to the voices of children.

E. Strengthening of monitoring mechanisms for the goals

32. The "A world fit for children" Plan of Action emphasizes the importance of monitoring progress towards the adopted goals. Many countries, which are implementing poverty reduction strategies or national development plans have established quite rigorous monitoring mechanisms, often coordinated by the central finance or planning ministry. Poverty reduction strategies normally include provisions for the involvement of major stakeholders in annual assessments and for public progress reports.

33. The mechanisms foreseen by the national plans of action for children are more varied and often less detailed. Some do not foresee a central monitoring mechanism, while in others, the body entrusted with the preparatory process is also responsible for monitoring and annual reporting. In some countries, the special session appears to have promoted the strengthening of provisions for monitoring. Many of the plans of action recognize reporting obligations to the general public and see civil society organizations as partners in monitoring progress.

34. Since the special session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has discussed the status of follow-up with reporting countries and its concluding observations include comments on the oral responses of Governments on this issue. There are indications that countries that will prepare reports in 2004 and beyond for

the Committee on the Rights of the Child will incorporate an assessment of progress in following up the commitments of the special session.

35. Another highly positive response to the monitoring of child-related goals has been the widespread national reporting in the last few years on the Millennium Development Goals. Some 73 countries had issued monitoring reports on the Millennium Development Goals as of July 2004.

36. The concern recognized in the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action to strengthen national statistical capacity is reflected in many of the national plans for children. Even though some countries have well-established systems for monitoring indicators relating to health and education, few have access to disaggregated data on all of the priority areas identified during the special session. Data availability is especially weak in the area of child protection. Even high income countries recognize information gaps and difficulties in developing policies to address such issues as discrimination against ethnic minorities or children at risk of abuse. However, better information is now available on child labour, as well as for birth registration, female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage.

37. The broad support for the Millennium Development Goals has created a common basis for the development of relevant indicators. There is now widespread collaboration among United Nations agencies and other international actors in support of the establishment by countries of a consolidated statistical system to monitor the relevant Goals, as well as to assist in reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other treaty bodies.

38. UNICEF is developing a new round of multiple indicator cluster surveys that will provide the largest single source of data for reporting on progress towards the child-related Millennium Development Goals and the goals of "A world fit for children". UNICEF is also working closely with the United States Agency for International Development-sponsored demographic and health surveys to ensure that comparable child-related data are produced from those surveys. Nearly 100 countries plan to carry out household surveys during 2005 and early 2006. These will provide a rich base of comparative data for detailed progress reporting to the General Assembly at its commemorative plenary meeting in 2007 on follow-up to the outcome of the special session (see General Assembly resolution 58/282, para. 8).

39. Over 40 countries have adopted the *Childinfo/Devinfo* database system for compiling and presenting child-related data and the number is expected to double by the end of 2004. Further innovations include the installation of computerized systems in schools and health facilities for monitoring local indicators, the creation of provincial child information centres and national observatories as centres for research and data-collection on children. These various data-collection and analysis systems will be used to generate information for reports on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of "A world fit for children".

40. Following the widespread involvement of children and young people in the preparatory process for the national plans of action, it is expected that they will be similarly involved in future monitoring and reviews. The Convening Committee of the Global Movement for Children will be facilitating collection of the views of children on progress in the implementation of the commitments of the special session through surveys to be conducted in 2004-2005.

III. Progress in the four major goal areas

A. Promoting healthy lives

41. Some 30,000 young lives are lost every day to preventable causes. With the support of the child health goals of "A world fit for children", the Millennium Declaration aims to reduce infant and under-five mortality rates by two thirds by 2015. Today, only a small proportion of countries are on track and the child health goals are in danger of not being attained in most regions if efforts are not stepped up. In support of acceleration towards those goals, the international community is launching a renewed partnership effort for child survival.

42. Three quarters of the world's children receive routine immunizations, averting an estimated 2.5 million deaths each year and preventing countless episodes of illness and disability. Still, 1.4 million children under five years of age die annually from vaccine-preventable diseases. Although immunization programmes have contributed significantly to child survival, coverage will remain highly inequitable until at least 80 per cent of children in all districts are immunized. That target was met for the three doses of the combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine (DPT3) in 46 developing countries in 2003.

43. Global coverage for DPT3 remained stable at 73 per cent in developing countries, although only 55 per cent of the children in sub-Saharan Africa were reached in 2002. In South Asia, coverage rose from 66 per cent in 2001 to 70 per cent in 2002. The number of polio-endemic countries was reduced to 6 by the end of 2003 and the goal of cutting measles deaths in half by 2005 is likely to be met. Significant progress has also been made to protect women from tetanus, but a shortfall in funding means the goal of eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus will not be achieved in every country by 2005.

44. Most countries continue to implement supplementary immunization activities for polio eradication and measles control. However, there is a critical need to strengthen routine immunization services in order to sustain the gains achieved. Major progress has been made in improving injection safety, with some 60 countries now using auto-disable syringes for all routine immunizations.

45. Some 43 countries provided 70 per cent or more of their children with at least one high-dose vitamin A supplement in 2002. As mass polio campaigns are phased out, new delivery strategies for vitamin A supplementation, such as "child health weeks", are being introduced and evaluated. Measles vaccinations and vitamin A supplementation have also been prioritized as life-saving interventions in a number of recent emergency and post-conflict situations.

46. Long-term financing for vaccines remains a serious challenge since neither developing country Governments nor the international community have yet been able to establish firm funding commitments. The development of financial sustainability plans by countries eligible for support from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization is an initial step, but greater political will is required.

47. Efforts to improve maternal health include the strengthening of referral systems and the inclusion of emergency obstetric care as a priority programme in national poverty reduction strategies. However, despite intensified efforts in some

countries, notably in parts of Asia and Latin America, safe motherhood initiatives still tend to suffer from resource shortages and lack of adequate attention.

48. The World Health Organization (WHO)/UNICEF Integrated Management of Childhood Illness strategy is a major initiative for the convergent delivery of services for child survival, growth and development. West African countries have piloted a complementary initiative for the UNICEF Accelerated Child Survival and Development programme. Based on country-level reports, it is broadly estimated that some 130 million people were covered by those two initiatives in 2003.

49. The WHO/UNICEF Integrated Management of Childhood Illness strategy for child health, which has been adopted in more than 90 countries, aims to improve health worker skills, health systems and family and community practices, including the management of diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria. It has been shown to improve the quality of care in facilities, but scaling up of the initiative has proven to be difficult, particularly where health systems are weak. The UNICEF Accelerated Child Survival and Development programme is supporting cost-effective interventions in 11 countries in West and Central Africa, including immunization, prevention and management of the main childhood killer diseases, vitamin A supplementation and antenatal care.

50. The use of insecticide-treated nets to combat malaria expanded in some 38 countries in 2003. At least 12 African countries are expected to reach 60 per cent usage rates among young children and pregnant women by 2005. Scaling up coverage remains a challenge and the rates of re-treatment of the nets with the recommended insecticide remain extremely low in most of the affected countries. Long-lasting nets have now been developed and the partners in the Roll Back Malaria initiative are working with the Rockefeller Foundation on a strategy to increase both production capacity and demand.

51. Although the world remains on track to reach the international target for safe drinking water, there is a significant challenge in terms of future resource requirements. South Asia has made rapid progress but continues to have the largest population without access to facilities. The lowest coverage levels continue to be in sub-Saharan Africa, despite recent progress there. In addition, action on sanitation has stalled in most developing regions and an estimated 2.6 million people remain without improved facilities.

52. More than a dozen countries in Asia and Central America are now having to implement arsenic detection and mitigation programmes. Major water and sanitation interventions have also been necessary in several crisis situations, in response to conflicts and floods.

53. Participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation is an approach now being implemented by African and Asian countries, which combines home visits for hygiene and sanitation promotion with nutritional advice, construction of latrines and training of caregivers in households with young children. The peer-to-peer approach is also proving to be an effective way to deliver hygiene and sanitation messages while promoting child participation.

54. Approximately 66 per cent of households in the developing world now consume adequately iodized salt,[2] a major improvement upon the 1990 estimate of less than one in five. As a result, some 79 million newborns are being protected every year from a significant loss in learning ability. The highest levels of iodization

have been achieved in Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific. The current rate in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS countries is only 39 per cent, but this represents an increase of 11 per cent in the last two years. There are still some 48 countries where less than half the population uses iodized salt, leaving many young children vulnerable. A strategy to accelerate progress towards the goal for the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders by 2005 has been developed by United Nations agencies and other partners, together with the salt industry.

55. The goals for child mortality reduction require a foundation of parental care practices as well as basic services. Over 80 developing countries have developed a set of key care practices based on WHO/UNICEF recommendations for promotion with families and communities to secure a child's best start in life. Many countries also have programmes for parenting education, ranging from orientation sessions at preschool centres and literacy classes to media initiatives. However, the coverage of such programmes is often low, particularly among the poorest families.

56. Global action in 2003 has supported progress towards an environment where women can exercise an informed decision on whether or not to breastfeed. Revised United Nations inter-agency guidelines have emphasized the need to assist HIV-positive mothers in selecting the most appropriate infant feeding options while reducing the risk of child mortality and increasing support for breastfeeding among the general population. The introduction of the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding has refocused efforts, including the baby-friendly hospital initiative, to provide support for women and families.

57. Some 57 developing countries now have national coordinating mechanisms for early childhood development, compared to 41 in 2002, while at least 30 developing countries now have official policies in that area.

B. Providing quality education

58. Large numbers of girls and boys still do not attend primary school and are denied their right to education. Estimates of the number of out-of-school children of primary age range from 104 million to over 120 million. The Millennium Declaration promises to give all children a full primary education by 2015 and the targets adopted under "A world fit for children" are explicitly designed to help achieve that goal. Intransigent problems such as armed conflict, child labour, child trafficking and HIV/AIDS create serious impediments. Investing in basic education is clearly a major preventive measure against HIV/AIDS and central to winning the fight against poverty.

59. According to current trends, several regions of the world, including much of Latin America, will achieve, or at least approach, the goal of universal primary education. Significant shortfalls are likely, however, in sub-Saharan Africa and possibly in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. The price of such failure is that over 75 million children might continue to be denied access to primary education in 2015.

60. In 2003, an estimated 53 per cent of the children of primary school age who were out of school were girls. The Millennium Summit and the special session aspired to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.

However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates that 76 countries are likely to miss reaching gender parity at primary and secondary levels by 2005. Increases in enrolment have not necessarily been accompanied by reductions in the gender gap. UNICEF estimates that while the ratio of girls to boys in terms of gross enrolment increased from 86 per cent to 92 per cent in developing countries during the 1990s, the primary school completion rates for girls still lagged behind those for boys by almost 10 per cent in 2002. This highlights the importance of targeted interventions to address the specific factors affecting the education of girls.

61. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative has been revitalized and is now focusing more on joint action by partners at the country level, supported by regional facilitation and global advocacy. The fast-track initiative on Education for All, launched by the World Bank in 2002, has also helped to increase the focus on disparities in drop-out and completion rates.

62. The most widespread gains in enrolment and gender parity have generally come about through mainstreaming efforts or through large-scale campaigns, such as back-to-school programmes in post-conflict situations. In other cases, such gains have been associated with major policy changes such as the abolition of school fees.

63. The assessment of progress in improving the quality of education has been hampered by a lack of widely used indicators and there remains a need for a comprehensive strategy for the monitoring and assessment of education quality. At the policy level, there is now greater emphasis on ensuring school conditions that are likely to contribute to quality improvements such as gender-sensitive curricula and teaching methods, adequate learning materials in both regular and post-crisis situations, clean water and sanitation facilities in schools and the promotion of hygiene and education on life skills. Over 30 countries have adopted a child-friendly package approach, which promotes improvements in the physical environment of schools together with the training of teachers and such interventions as school meals.

C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence

64. Since 2002, conflicts have continued to create large numbers of refugee and internally displaced children whose human rights, including the right to survival, are put at great risk. Globally, poverty and the breakdown of the family still leave many millions of children living on the streets, working in hazardous occupations, exposed to violence and abuse or deprived of access to education. The growing numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans mean that more and more children are in need of alternative forms of family care.

65. The identification by the Security Council of countries where children continue to be recruited and used as child soldiers has been a positive development. Greater attention should also be paid to child trafficking as a widespread violation of human rights. The United Nations study on violence against children, which was mandated by the Assembly in 2001, is bringing together the expertise and experience of a range of United Nations agencies as well as academic and non-governmental organizations despite continued funding constraints.

66. Countries continue to commit themselves to improved international standards for child protection. Seventy-seven States are now party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, compared to 16 at the end of 2001. Seventy-eight States are now party to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, also up from 16 at the end of 2001. Since 2002, 37 countries have ratified ILO Convention No. 182, bringing the total to 150 countries.

67. There were numerous high-level international consultations on child protection during 2003, including a meeting in Addis Ababa on female genital mutilation/cutting and the East Asia and Pacific regional review of juvenile justice. United Nations-assisted programmes for child protection are now placing greater emphasis on systemic change. These include interventions to promote and support legislative reform, attitudinal change, capacity-building among those working to protect children, national monitoring and the skills of children and adolescents to protect themselves. Examples of collaborative efforts include the United Nations inter-agency project on human trafficking in the greater Mekong subregion and a multi-agency group formed in South Asia to carry out a midterm review of the Yokohama process on combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

68. Progress is especially apparent in the reform of juvenile justice systems, although custodial sentencing continues to be too heavily used as a response to children in conflict with the law. The pressures of the breakdown of the family owing to poverty and HIV/AIDS have led some countries to favour institutional responses over more appropriate, community-based alternatives.

69. More than 80 countries have adopted specific action plans and concrete programmes to tackle child labour. A growing number are also addressing the problem through social and labour policy development in the framework of poverty reduction strategies or as an integral part of national development efforts. The modality of time-bound programmes to combat child labour, initiated by the ILO international programme on the elimination of child labour since 2001, has been the most ambitious approach and is being implemented by at least 15 countries at present.

70. There has been encouraging progress on the review and strengthening of legal standards to protect children from violence, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, the CIS and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Several countries in the Caribbean have implemented campaigns for the prevention of abuse against children. Community mobilization and public declarations have emerged as promising strategies against the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting.

71. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF have collaborated to ensure the consideration of child protection in peacekeeping missions. These agencies, the World Bank, the ILO and NGOs have also supported the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers in several countries. Work has been stepped up to improve the protection of women and children from sexual violence in humanitarian crises, including through the training of humanitarian workers and the establishment of procedures to encourage and enable the reporting of abuse.

72. Practical difficulties are often faced by families in registering child births, particularly those compelled to travel a long way to reach the government centres.

Some countries are now allowing initial birth registration by community workers or are combining registration with the delivery of immunization and other services. In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, birth and orphan registration is gaining acceptance as a measure to increase the protection of children's rights in countries severely affected by HIV/AIDS.

73. While there are many striking examples of good practices to improve child protection, overall it seems unlikely that the goals of "A world fit for children" will be reached without accelerated efforts and the more systematic mainstreaming of protective measures in major national planning instruments. This is a concern both in itself and also because of the role of improved protection in helping to achieve the other goals of "A world fit for children" and of the Millennium Declaration. Achievement of the international education goals, for example, depends significantly on measures that re-establish learning opportunities for children affected by conflict, ensure school places for orphaned children, address the impact of violence and eliminate as quickly as possible the worst forms of child labour.

D. Combating HIV/AIDS

74. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a massive and increasing disaster for children. Over two million children under the age of 15 are infected with the HIV virus or are living with AIDS. Globally, 15 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS, the vast majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

75. By 2010, the number of children orphaned by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa alone is projected to exceed 18 million. This is just a fraction of the number of children whose lives will have been radically altered by the impact of HIV/AIDS on their families, communities, schools, health-care and livelihood systems. With rates of HIV infection still on the rise in many regions, this crisis for children will persist for decades, even as prevention and treatment programmes are expanded.

76. The response of families and communities to the plight of these children has been remarkably resilient. However, they are struggling under the strain. To date, few resources have reached those who are providing this front-line response, and limited attention has been given to orphans and vulnerable children in most national development plans.

77. Increasingly, the face of HIV/AIDS is young and female. Women and girls now account for half of all people infected with HIV. Their numbers are likely to rise since they are more vulnerable than men or boys to infection owing to biological and social factors. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls and women between the ages of 15 and 24 are over three times more likely to be infected by HIV as their male counterparts. They are also disproportionately burdened with caring for the ill and orphaned.

78. The nature of the epidemic varies across regions, but sub-Saharan Africa continues to bear the brunt. Two thirds of those living with HIV or AIDS are in this region, and almost 80 per cent of all AIDS deaths in 2003 occurred there. The epidemic is increasing in intensity in other parts of the world, including South and East Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

79. Where HIV/AIDS is declining, it is primarily because young people have learned to practice safe behaviours. Programme response is increasingly focused on

meeting the needs of young people for information, skills and services. Of the most affected, largest and highly vulnerable countries, 23 are developing or have national strategies in place for preventing HIV among young people.

80. However, as reported in 20002 in the UNICEF publication, *Young People and HIV/AIDS: Opportunity in Crisis*, knowledge about HIV among young people remains shockingly low. Although most young people surveyed were aware of AIDS, there were major gaps in knowledge about ways to prevent transmission. Many countries have started to intensify their efforts in this area, including through a focus on peer education. However, far more will be required to achieve the global goal of equipping 90 per cent of young people with the knowledge they need to protect themselves from HIV.

81. In 2003, an estimated 71 countries had national strategies for education on life skills, including such elements as curriculum reform and teacher training. A key challenge in most cases is to ensure that young people are reached early in adolescence and that skills development continues into young adulthood. Rapid scaling up of appropriate education on life skills is an urgent priority.

82. It will also be important to ensure a focus on adolescents in programmes aimed at the strengthening of health services. The WHO publication entitled *Adolescent Friendly Health Services — An Agenda for Change* highlights the role that adolescents themselves can play, in conjunction with committed adults, to contribute to their own health and well-being.

83. In 2003, programmes to prevent parent-to-child transmission of HIV were operating in about 70 developing countries, compared to 41 in 2001. The level of effort within these countries has also increased. Five developing countries had nationwide programmes and 26 were in the process of going to scale. In addition, through maternal and child health-care programmes, large numbers of women are receiving information on how to prevent HIV infection.

84. However, coverage and retention continue to pose a challenge for programmes to prevent transmission. Social stigma and partner resistance limit the acceptance of the services offered. One strategy to increase participation is to register all antenatal clients, allowing them the option of dropping out of counselling and testing rather than having to opt in. Mobilization efforts are also needed to increase partner involvement and engage communities in planning and implementation.

85. Appropriate infant-feeding in the context of HIV is a key component of reducing the risk of transmission of the virus to infants through breastfeeding while minimizing the risks associated with the use of breast milk substitutes. Recent efforts to increase access to antiretroviral therapy are expected to reduce stigma and offer mothers an additional incentive to participate in programmes to prevent HIV transmission to their newborns. Efforts to prevent transmission also provide an important link to treatment and support for people living with HIV or AIDS.

86. Support for people living with HIV or AIDS received a desperately needed boost as the cost of antiretroviral therapy in developing countries dropped and global initiatives were launched to improve access. These include the "3 by 5" initiative, led by WHO to provide treatment to 3 million people by 2005, and a United States presidential initiative, which is allocating resources for care and support in highly affected countries.

87. An estimated 36 countries had put national strategies in place for the protection and care of orphans and vulnerable children by the end of 2003. The first global partners forum on orphans and vulnerable children, which included United Nations agencies, Governments, bilateral donors, non-governmental and faith-based organizations, research institutions and private foundations was held in October 2003 and adopted a framework to help guide and accelerate the response.

88. Support for orphans and vulnerable children is still reaching only limited numbers. Steps to expand the scope of this support have included both research and follow-up action. Building on the research sponsored by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNICEF and the World Conference of Religions for Peace in six African countries, an information kit has been developed to assist religious leaders in addressing HIV/AIDS and the care of children and young people affected by the epidemic. Increasingly, countries are recognizing that schools can provide a hub for meeting the broader needs of vulnerable children and their families, particularly if fees are reduced or abolished.

89. Overall, owing to the special sessions of the Assembly on HIV/AIDS and children, there has been stronger leadership at all levels and new resources have been mobilized. Access to antiretroviral treatment has become a major international priority. Actions have increased to prevent the spread of AIDS in emergency situations. Yet the progress achieved still pales in the light of the spread of the epidemic and its impact, especially on children and young people.

90. Lessons learned over the last two years include: the need for continued efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination; the importance of addressing the crisis facing children across all relevant sectors and through such instruments as poverty reduction strategies; the strong potential of new partnerships, such as those emerging with faith-based and other civil society organizations; the need to focus on the rights of girls and young women as those most vulnerable to the epidemic; the potential of education and school-based interventions to contribute to progress; and the importance of improved monitoring and the rapid dissemination of research results to help nations take practical actions to reverse the spread and impact of AIDS.

IV. Ways forward

91. The special session children adopted a set of goals, which complement and strongly reinforce the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. The special session goals represent important milestones in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, bringing more specificity to the actions that need to be taken to achieve them. The updated analysis of progress in the present report suggests that most of the goals of "A world fit for children" will only be achieved if there is a major intensification of action for disadvantaged children and families across the world.

92. In the two years since the special session there have been numerous but often isolated examples of rapid progress in both individual countries and regions. Those examples demonstrate that accelerated progress is possible but also that current efforts need to be scaled up and better supported, both by resource allocations and by action at the political level.

93. Momentum in the second year of follow-up to the special session has in fact been significant. Of the 190 countries that adopted the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action, at least 169, subsequently joined by Timor-Leste, have taken or foresee taking action to operationalize its goals. Of these, 126 have opted for national plans of action or policies specifically for children, while others have incorporated the goals, to a greater or lesser extent, in macroplanning or sectoral planning instruments. Many of the plans of action, however, have yet to fully develop linkages to national budgeting and monitoring mechanisms.

94. The goals of "A world fit for children" are benefiting from the widespread support among Governments and international agencies for the Millennium Development Goals since the two are mutually enhancing. However, the fact that the Millennium Development Goals do not explicitly include child protection targets raises the challenge of ensuring that this priority area is appropriately considered in the national planning process, including in poverty reduction strategies. This should take into account the ways in which the protection of children affects the fulfilment of human rights and that an insufficient focus on addressing such protection problems as child trafficking, child labour and violence against children, is likely to significantly hinder national development progress.

95. Much work still remains to be done in order to ensure adequate and sustained national budget allocations for children, supplemented by donor assistance where needed. Countries with poverty reduction strategies and national development plans generally have budgets that are well elaborated, and these instruments provide an important means for directing resources to programmes that benefit children.

96. In many countries, the implementation of programmes for children will continue to be a challenge owing to weaknesses in institutional capacity, in addition to budgetary constraints and, in a number of cases, conflict and instability. Among the possible ways forward are the establishment of national councils for children, capacity-building of national child agencies and collaboration with parliamentarians and civil society organizations in the promotion of child-focused budgets.

97. The more inclusive processes, which have been used in the initial follow-up to the special session, have resulted in a greater sense of ownership by civil society organizations and the expectation that they will continue to be involved in subsequent phases. Many of the completed plans are now being applied at the local level. High priority should be given to maintaining the involvement of civil society as a key part of the effort to mobilize society resources to fulfil the rights of children.

98. Two notable innovations are the recognition of children and young people as a major constituency and their involvement in many government-led decision-making processes. In the two years since the special session, a proliferation of activities have also been undertaken by and with children and young people. These trends, however, increase the need for adequate standards for the meaningful and continued participation of children.

99. Building on the efforts already made by Governments, regular reporting to the public on progress towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of "A world fit for children" should be ensured as an important means of social mobilization for those goals, as well as for strengthened accountability. In addition, assistance should be provided to civil society and

community groups to enable them to play an important role in generating information on specific groups, such as children orphaned by AIDS.

100. Regional mechanisms are playing an important role in maintaining political support for the goals of the special session and in monitoring progress across countries. The mechanisms could be further utilized to facilitate the intercountry exchange of experience and good practices in child-related programmes.

101. At the international level, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has the potential to promote a closer linkage between follow-up on the special session goals, the Millennium Development Goals and States parties periodic reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Use should be made of the Committee's concluding observations on States parties reports to maintain government and public mobilization around the goals for children. The United Nations system should continue to assist Member States in their follow-up to those observations, where required.

102. In its "A world fit for children" Plan of Action and in subsequent resolutions, the Assembly has called on the Secretary-General to report regularly to it on progress in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the special session. Further updates on progress will accordingly be provided to the Assembly in 2005 and 2006, leading up to a more detailed report and analysis to be submitted to the commemorative plenary meeting scheduled for 2007. The review process leading to that detailed report will be based on national reports and all countries are therefore encouraged to conduct in-depth reviews of progress in or before 2006. The United Nations system remains committed to providing support to national and regional initiatives, where required. UNICEF will continue to work closely with Governments and with other United Nations and international partners, including for the collection and dissemination of information on the progress and experience gained in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action.

Notes

[1] There were 10 countries for which information was not available for the purposes of the present report.

[2] The latest estimates reflect new monitoring in countries that were previously not reporting.